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ABSTRACT

Defining the "product" approach to composition as that which emphasizes the finished product over the steps that led up to completion, and the "process" approach as that which emphasizes the recursive steps that lead to the final product, this paper compares these two approaches to composition instruction. The first section provides a rationale that explores the shift from product to process oriented instruction, a definition of terms, and the intent of the comparison. The second section presents the comparison, introducing the general differences. This section explores the importance of process over product, the naturalistic learning environment, and the relative importance of writing within the curriculum, all of which characterize the process approach. In addition, this section examines the three principle differences between the process and product approaches--specifically topic choice, revisions, and writing conferences between teacher and student. The third section presents conclusions drawn from this comparision, particularly the implication that teachers must approach writing with the same naturalistic approach they take with children who are learning to talk, and the suggestion that research should be undertaken to determine just how widely the process approach is being used in the classroom. A three page list of references concludes the paper. (HTH)

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Major Differences Between Product and Process Approaches to Composition: Topic Choice, Revision, and the Writing Conference.

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If one recalls the leaden words in which teachers sometimes assign composition tasks to young and impressionable pupils, of the listless, hopeless air with which the pupils go about the work, of the relief apparent on every face when the disagreeable job is done with, need he wonder why so much composition teaching is barren of results....

There is no more pestilent heresy than the notion that children are deficient in ideas for composition work. Their minds swarm with ideas, and in a normal condition children will express themselves almost incessantly.

Scott and Dennery 1905
Quoted by: Stewart, 1978, p.17.

...The actual content of [the letter] is dictated to the teacher, who writes the sentences on the blackboard for the children to copy.

After the children have copied the letter from the board, a committee of three or more children may be appointed to select a well-written letter to send to the desired address. Each child works very hard on penmanship and form of letter in order that his letter may be chosen. If the committee is guided in making a wise selection, the losers usually accept the decision, and try harder next time.

Hatchett and Hughes, 1956, p.235.

[When a visitor to a fourth grade writing process classroom heard Susie describing her revision process to her peers he said] "'I got here just in time'. I thought of the changes in Susie's writing and in her classrooms since I'd entered her world two years earlier. Our visitor hadn't seen the changing interactions between Susie, her teachers and her classmates, or the accompanying changes in her writing strategies....Our visitor had seen the product but he'd missed out on the process. He'd missed the story of Susie's growth in writing, and of how writing was taught and learned in her classrooms. 'I guess we see it differently,' I said to him. 'I'd say you got here just too late.'"

Calkins, 1983, pp. 4-5.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE - Introduction....4

Rationale....4

Definition of Terms....6

Statement of Intent....7

CHAPTER TWO - Comparison of Product versus Process Approach....8

Introduction to General Differences....8

Importance of Process over Product....8

Naturalistic Learning Environment....10

Relative Importance of Writing Within the Curriculum....11

Topic Choice....12

Revisions....15

Writing Conferences....19

CHAPTER THREE - Conclusions....23

Implications for Teaching....23

Suggestions for Future Research....24

Conclusions....28

BIBLIOGRAPHY....31

Three Differences Between Product and Process Approaches to Composition: Topic Choice, Revision, and the Writing Conference.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Writing... what images does the term elicit? What memories does it touch? Certainly one of the three R's, and a vital communication skill, writing seems to have been sadly neglected in the history of school curricula. Until recently, textbooks devoted to the study of composition were difficult, if not impossible, to find. Writing was discussed as a part of the general Language Arts.

During the course of the past twelve years, however, there have been dramatic changes in the way in which writing is perceived, researched, and subsequently taught. Beginning with theorists such as Moffett, Murrary, and Elbow and researchers like Janet Emig and Donald Graves, writing, and the study of it, became important endeavors for teachers and researchers alike.

Before 1970, composition was one of the least researched areas in the field of education. Graves pointed out that "for every $3000 spent on children's ability to receive information [through reading] $1.00 was spent on their power to send it in writing. The funds for writing research come to less than one-tenth of one percent of all research funds for education" (1984d, p. 92).

Historically, it was believed that children had to learn how to read before they could learn how to write. School curricula reflected this belief with scope and sequence charts that did not include personal writing until well into the primary grades.

Carol Chomsky, however, wrote in 1971 that children are ready to write as soon as they know a few sound/symbol relationships. She was of the opinion that children should learn to read by reading their own writings. The work of Clay (1975) and Bissex (1981) support her theories.

Indeed, children "write" long before we traditionally think of them as being able to do so. Vygotsky (1962) contends that a child's physical gestures contain the origins of writing. The gestures develop into scribbles and non-differentiated markings, drawings, and finally into abstract but codified symbols. Even children who are not able to control a pencil can write by using letter tiles, blocks, or a keyboard. Calkins writes that "research has shown that ninety percent of all children come to school believing they can write..."(1983, p. 11)

I come to the study of writing as a Kindergarten teacher who teaches children to read by teaching them how to write. It is through the writing of letters, then words, and finally sentences that we approach and individualize the reading readiness skills incorporated into most Kindergarten programs. Because of this interest, I feel it is important to become aware of the research trends of the past twelve years, and the impact that new compostion theory is having on the way children write in their classrooms.

Definition of Terms

One term that permeates much of the literature concerning the process approach to writing is "recursive". A newly defined expression, it describes a process that is the opposite of "linear": a process that goes forward, backward, off on a tangent, back again, etc. Calkins (1983, p. 150) gives an interpretation of the recursive writing process as diagrammed by Donald Murray:

It is interesting to note that just as the process of writing is recursive, so, too, would we like our description of it to be. Nearly every writer I encountered, however, made a qualifying statement to the effect that, because of the limitations of print, they had to describe a recursive and interractive process in a somewhat linear fashion. I, too, feel constrained by the linearity of print.

A term that is central to this paper is "process approach" as it currently applies to composition. Reference to writing as a process is not exactly new. Stewart (1978) reports on the work of Scott and Denney who co-authored articles and books on composition. Although these men wrote approximately 85 years ago, they discussed composition in terms of the process by which it is created. "'A composition [was] regarded not as a dead form, to be analyzed into its component parts, but as a living product of an active, creative mind'" (1978, p. 16). The current emphasis on the steps of the process, however, as opposed to the

finished product, represents a dramatic change from approaches that have generally been used in schools.

Graves defines the writing process as:

> a series of operations leading to the solution of a problem The process begins when the writer consciously or unconsciously starts a topic and is finished when the piece is published. (1984a, p. 145)

There are several steps to the writing process and different authors use different terms to discuss the steps. Some of these will be dealt with later. The important element here is the importance of process as opposed to product.

The "product approach" to composition will be defined as that style of teaching which emphasizes the finished product over the steps which led up to completion. The goal is a technically correct product. The teacher is in control. He or she defines the composition in terms of certain objectives, methods, and structure rather than allowing each child to chose a process designed to fit his or her individual needs.

Statement of Intent

This paper will attempt to compare the product approach to composition with the process approach. Specifically, three areas of significant difference will be analized: topic choice, revision, and conferencing. Teaching techniques and educational implications will be discussed. Suggestions for future research will be presented.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPARISONS OF PRODUCT AND PROCESS APPROACHES

Introduction to General Differences

Importance of Process over Product

The basic difference between the process approach and the more traditionally used product approach to writing begins with the relative view taken of the finished product. In product approach curricula, the finished composition was the major focus of all instruction and practice. Children were constantly admonished to have correct, neat, and properly organized work. If it was not, then the child had to recopy the piece until it was satisfactory. Little emphasis was placed on content; talk of "revision", as opposed to, "proof-reading" and "editing" was scarce. Children were often afraid to take chances with their writing lest they make an error and have to re-write the entire paper.

In traditional curricula, the product was so important that it often took precedence over individual writing styles, developmental levels, and personalities. At the elementary level, for instance, when a class note was written, the content was put on the board and all children were required to copy the group letter exactly. In high school, students were taught to write by modeling the various styles of published authors. If "cause and effect" was the topic for the week the children would read a piece of work from that genre and then seek to emulate, and theoretically, learn that style.

At all levels of instruction, teachers assumed (either for reasons of pedagogy or schedule convenience) that all children could work at the same rate. Consequently, papers were assigned according to a class schedule. No allowances were made for individual paces.

Judging from the amount of textbook space devoted to the teaching of grammar versus that spent on actual writing, it would appear that most composition programs prior to 1970 advocated a strong approach to skills aquisition in grammar. Many teachers felt that mastery of grammatical rules led (ipso facto) to success in writing. Furthermore, it was widely believed that grammar and punctuation skills could be taught outside of the actual writing millieu. Teachers felt that children could transfer the skills learned in a workbook to the real life situation of writing.

The reasearch does not agree. Those studies that have been conducted to examine the relationship between grammatical expertise and writing proficiency show overwhelming evidence which denies any positive correlation of the two abilities . Hillocks (1982) cites the 1963 Braddock study which came to the following conclusion:

> [it] can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible, or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing. (p.3)

Calkins (1981) has published some interesting data concerning punctuation use by process approach writers versus product approach

writers. When she asked children from each type of classroom to give the use for fourteen kinds of punctuation she found that:

> the third grade 'writers' who had not had formal instruction in punctuation could define/explain an average of 8.66 kinds of punctuation. The children who had studied punctuation through classwork, drills and tests, but had rarely written were only able to define/explain 3.85 kinds of punctuation. (p. 90)

While never denying the importance of the finished product, the current trend in composition teaching is to address the issue of the process by which children arrive at a final draft and approach various writing tasks. Researchers and practitioners feel that it is through the study and practice of the steps within the process that we will be able to improve overall writing abilities.

Naturalistic Learning Environment

The second major difference between the process approach advocates and product teachers is in their respective attitudes towards their students' writing. The traditional approach was generally quite negative. Topics were assigned, required length given, due date recorded. The children sent off to work on their own to write the composition. Papers were written, graded, re-written to accomodate teacher corrections, and handed in again. Teaching was often most active after the paper had been graded and the student was responding to the teacher's remarks. The only problem was that by then the student had often lost interest in the paper, was irritated by the grade, and did not give full effort towards the corrections. At the other end of

the spectrum was the child who was satisfied with the grade and did not strive to improve.

The process approach tends to be quite positive. It builds from a base of what a child does know to what the child does not yet know. There is support for children to learn to develop their own topics. Through teacher and peer conferencing, the children have constant feedback on their work as well as skills instruction. Children are trained to listen to and respond to their own ideas, not just those of the teacher. Children are given the opportunity to develop their ideas. No longer is contemplative time considered wasted time.

Another way of looking at this is that the process approach is "child oriented" versus "teacher dominated". The teacher allows for flexibility in order to accomodate the skill, interest, pace and style of each writer in the class. Skills are taught in meaningful contexts. The child, however, always maintains control over the text.

Relative Importance of Writing Within the Curriculum

Finally, the relative importance of writing within the English curriculum seems to have changed with the process approach to writing. Writing, in the decades prior to 1970 when the process approach became well known, was relegated to Friday afternoons when, and if, the other work for the week had been completed. As recently as five years ago, a survey of classrooms in Manchester, NH found that less than 1% of classroom time was being spent on writing instruction (Kearns, 1985).

Process approach curricula realize the need for continuity and practice and advocate that writing workshops be held for long stretches

of time on a regular basis. Forty-five minutes to an hour, each day, four times a week, is recommended even at the early grades.

Calkins found that children's writing reflected the pace of the classroom. When the day was broken into 10, 15, and 20 minute chunks of time, "the...writing reflected the staccato rhythm of the classroom" (1983 p. 30). Children did not have the time to become committed to their writing. When they were allowed to write for extended periods, and they knew that the writing periods were regularly scheduled, then they were able to invest themselves in their writing.

Topic Choice

How a child chooses, or is not allowed to choose, a topic (while not usually listed as a step in the writing process) is important in the debate concerning which approach to use when teaching composition. Historically, children have not been given very much freedom in determining topics for their writing. Teachers chose topic and design and then guided the children through the requisite steps to completion. It is interesting to note that "topic choice" does not even appear in the indices of selected language arts books written before the work of modern process advocates became popular.

In textbooks, even some that have been written since 1970, writing is often described in terms of personal letters, get well messages to absent classmates, club minutes, and newsletter articles. Far more time is spent discussing the development of skills acquisition than is devoted to teaching children how to access and convey their thoughts.

In language arts manuals written prior to 1970 uncertainty concerning writing curricula seemed to prevail. In their 1956 book Teaching Language Arts in Elementary Schools, Hatchett and Hughes describe what they believe "purposeful writing experiences [to be as]...writing letters, making reports,making a class directory, outlining, and summarizing, note-taking, or keeping records" (p. 232). In the section on "creative prose writing", however, the authors state that:

> the purpose of...giving children opportunities to write stories is...to develop and preserve the original and individualistic powers of the children, and to provide an outlet for the children's inner tensions and ideas. (p.279)

These last objectives sound very up-to-date, but if insufficient time was devoted to personal writing or if the emphasis was on mechanics rather than content, then the message was lost. Even when a teacher allowed the class to have a free writing assignment, she was not always willing to allow the children the time or the environment in which to develop good topics. As the NCTE Language Arts text of 1954 points out "with some children, it was necessary to stimulate writing by suggesting titles..." (Smith p. 281).

When the call went out to include more "creative writing" in school curricula it is evident that many leading publishers felt that children had to be given ideas to stimulate the writing process. Story starters were popular 25 years ago and, sadly, remain in use today.

The very basis of the new approach to writing, however, centers on the belief that every child has a story to tell and that if we allow the

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child free topic choice the results will be excellent. Graves writes that:

> the data show that writers who learn to chose topics well make the most significant growth in both information and skills...The child exercises strongest control, establishes ownership...and pride in the piece. (1983, p. 21)

Research has shown that if a child is allowed to write on self-chosen topics, he or she will probably choose to write much more. Graves found that 7-year olds wrote four times as much when they were able to select their own topics (cited in Emig, 1982).

It is important to note that Graves emphasizes the fact that children must learn to chose topics well. Beginning writers, and children who have grown up experiencing only story starters and topic assignments need guidance to chose topics that are appropriate: not too broad nor too narrow, personally invested, and interesting to the intended audience. There are several ways writers can learn this skill.

Graves (1983) feels that teachers should model topic choice techniques with their students. This could be done by writing with an over-head projector. The class might invite an author in to explain how she settles on topics. The children can learn about topic choice from observing their peers. The sharing of work will serve to stimulate ideas throughout the class. Students might interview one another, a classroom visitor, or a friend to generate a topic. Brain-storming ideas is often helpful in illiciting new topics.

Writing process teachers remind us that learning to choose a meaningful topic takes time. It is not a skill that can be mastered as

math facts can. The data from the NIE study show that, on any given day, only 20-25% of the writers in a room will be working on what might be considered "hot topics" (Graves, 1983, p. 29). The children who are having difficulty with topic selection are often inspired by this group. Even if ideas are not specifically exchanged, enthusiasm is contagious. It is important for teachers to be patient and to serve only to guide children in their decisions.

Voice, which is the "dynamo of the writing process," (Graves, 1983 p. 31) comes from well chosen topics: topics in which the child has a vested interest. Such topics promote the feeling of ownership, which is essential to motivation and revision. If teachers want children to be thoughtful in their choice of topic then they must have faith that the children can make sound judgements. Graves and his fellow researchers have shown us that they can.

Revisions

Revision is the vehicle by which the writer comes to terms with the subject and develops the voice which will lend power to the writing. It is through this manipulation of language, this re-thinking of ideas, that writing growth takes place. Many writers consider revision the motivating force behind their writing. Murray (1982a, p. 72) says that "writing is re-writing."

When comparing process to product, it appears that there were few, if any, allowances made for revision in the product approach. The topic cannot be found in most language arts books written before 1970. In one

text, written in the 1960's, revision was always mentioned with proofreading as if the two terms were synonomous.

Such consideration led teachers and their students to the belief that revising was a negative step; one to be avoided. Revisions were only necessary when there were errors in the composition. Re-writing implied failure...it was "the price you [had] to pay if you [didn't] get it right the first time" (Murray, 1982b, p. 121). Students who recieved good comments on their stories were not encouraged to revise; students who wrote papers that did not meet the teacher's standards were required to "revise" to conform to someone else's expectations.

Since composition topics were usually assigned in the product approach, students had very little vested interest. Consequently, they were not as likely to revise as if the topic had been their own.

To the process teacher, however, revision is the very essence of writing. It is through revision that the writer develops the voice and clarity that characterize good writing.

Researchers and theorists have categorized various types of revisions. Before discussing them, however, one caution must be issued. Several people have written that we must not urge or allow revisions solely for the sake of the process or the teacher. Failgley and Witte (1984) believe that "unguided or misguided revision may actually be detrimental to the final product" (p. 107). Caulkins (1983) found children revising just to please the teacher or impress friends. Graves (1984b) implores teachers not to succomb to the new orthodoxy that dictates that <u>every</u> text must be revised.

In 1978 Donald Murrary theorized that there are two distinct types of revision. He labeled them "internal" and "external". Internal revision is "everything writers do to discover and develop what they have to say..."(1982a, p. 77). External revision is "what writers do to communicate what they have found they have written to another audience" (1982a, p. 77). Murrary believes that writers spend substantially more time on internal revision but that textbooks and product teachers have traditionally emphasized external revisions.

Faigley and Whitte (1984), responding to the need for a "reliable system for distinguishing between structural and surface revisions" (p. 95) developed a taxonomy of revisions. Divided between surface and meaning changes (to correspond to external and internal revisions), each category was assigned a numerical code. The system was then used in protocol analysis to attempt to measure the effects of revision on text. While recognizing the fact that the scale is subject to varied interpretations by researchers, these authors do contend that its use will demonstrate the recursive nature of the revision process as well as the differences between internal and external revisions.

Calkins, (1983) in her observations of third and fourth grade children isolated four types of revisions. The first stage is the simple addition of more information or writing a slightly different story without looking back at the first. Initially, Calkins did not want to consider revision at the simplest level. Then she realized that she was imposing her judgement on the process while, for the children, the simple types of revisions were real and necessary beginnings.

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The second stage she called "refining". Here, minor changes that did not effect the meaning of the story were made. At this stage, some children call simple editing "revision."

A transition stage came next. In this stage, the writer was often frustrated because he or she had a vision of what was wanted but was not always able to revise to achieve the desired result.

Finally, true, meaningful changes were made that affected the voice and substance of the work. The following excerpt gives a description of Susie, who has entered the final stage of revision:

> While in third grade, revision tended to be a way to correct errors, by early fourth grade it had become a way to experiment While in third grade revision usually involved a backward movement to correct or replace something 'wrong', by early fourth grade revision involved a new sense of possibility, of exploration. (Calkins, p. 85)

Calkin's stages complement those described by Murray and Faigley and Whitte. They also show that learning how to revise is a developmental process through which all writers must proceede.

Murray, in his recently published book, A Writer Teaches Writing, takes a new stance on revision. Rather than seeing revision as a step in the writing process, he feels that "it is the process [of collect - plan - develop] repeated as many times as is necessary to produce a text worthy of editing" (1985, p. 56).

Writing Conferences

The writing conference is the principal teaching technique used in the process approach to writing. It is through brief, but frequent and regular encounters with others that children learn the essential skills of writing: topic choice, revision, clarity, grammar, etc. As with other steps in the writing process, the power of the conference comes from the child. While the teacher sets the tone, and knows the ultimate direction in which the children will be aimed, it is each individual child who needs to feel control over the conference and thus the writing. The child makes the final decisions about his or her work.

There are several types of conference situations. The teacher can meet with one child, with a small group of children, or with the class as a whole. A child can have a conference with another child, or a small group of children can have a group conference. All these types of meetings serve purposes within the process classroom. Central to all types of conferencing is the fact that children learn to solve their own writing problems. Conferencing can take place during all phases of the writing process.

Murray (1985) feels that the text is an important participant in each conference. He uses the term "trialog" to describe the interaction between the writer, the conference participant(s) and the text (p. 150). He feels that:

> the writer reads and rereads and rereads, standing far back and reading quickly from a distance, moving in close and

reading slowly line by line, reading again and again
knowing that the answers to all writing problems lie within
the evolving text. (p. 151)

Conference techniques are very individual. Each teacher must develop a style that works for him or her, in each particular classroom and with each child. The general concept, however, remains the same. The important thing for teachers to remember is to be consistent. Just as children need a classroom environment that is dependable, so, too, do they need a predictable conferencing environment. Research from Graves (1983) has shown that it is out of these predictable situations that growth occurs. When children feel secure they become willing to take chances.

The teacher approaches the conference as an ally, not an adversary. This can be reflected in the physical position that the teacher takes as well as in the types of questions asked. The teacher sits next to, rather than across from, the child. The teacher is at the child's level rather than standing over the child. The writer maintains control at all times. This can be physically evidenced by the child holding on to the text and making his or her own revisions or editorial marks on the paper.

Conferences should be short and generally limited to one skill at a time. Conferencing gives the child and the teacher a chance to "touch base". Only a minute or two is needed to make sure that the child is on the right track, for the child to ask any questions, or for the teacher to stimulate ideas. Longer conferences can be scheduled if necessary to address a difficult problem.

The writing conference can also take place between the author and his or her peers. Calkins (1983) found that third and fourth grade students conferenced "throughout the entire writing process" (p. 117). The children discussed everything from topic choice and writer's block to drafting ideas and potential revisions on an informal basis. These discussions were usually very helpful since the children were talking with their audience and, therefore, could get first-hand feedback on their questions.

The conference approach can be used as a mini-lesson to introduce a topic of general interest. If, for example, several children are using dialogue and need help learning how to use quotation marks, the teacher will meet with just those children and have a short lesson. If several children are at the point of choosing a topic, the teacher might have a small conference with them to brainstorm ideas, discuss interests, map ideas, etc.

Conferencing can take the form of group sharing at the end of a writing period. This was used effectively in the Atkinson study as a means of creating positive class attitudes. The teachers emphasized the importance of children helping one another. Mrs. Currier, the fourth grade teacher, felt that each child in her class was also a writing teacher. She taught the children to trust one another for honest opinions and advice:

> She demonstrated a respect for other people, expected it from the children, and insisted on it. And so, at an age when children often grow increasingly self-conscious and hesitant to share, her children grew more trusting and more able to

help each other. (Calkins, 1983, p. 115)

The data from the Atkinson study have shown that it is very important for young children to share their work as they progress. The writers need to be reminded that they have a concrete audience that cares about the work in progress. Sharing is a motivating force for the writer who is able to discuss work in progress.

Children must learn how to have successful conferences. Most importantly, they must learn to ask good questions. This is true for the writer who is leading the conference as well for the respondents. The children and teacher must also learn to listen well, give specific examples, and remember never to take control away from the writer. Conferencing skills do not happen over night. The teacher and the students must work as a group to refine their skills. If they are successful, writing will improve.

Finally, Calkins (1983) states that what we call the writing conference is really much more than that. She calls it a language conference as well. In describing her research she found that:

> children used and developed skills in reading, listening, and speaking as well as in writing. And although we assumed that their purpose was to help the writer, in reality, the learning was collaborative and mutual. Both the writer and the listener helped each other. (p. 124)

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSIONS

Implications for Teaching

I believe that teachers must approach writing with the same naturalistic approach that we take with children who are learning to talk. Children progress through developmental writing stages in much the same way as they pass through stages in cognitive and linguistic growth. I believe that the process approach to writing presents the most effective teaching/learning model in which to promote written communication. Finally, I believe that the process approach to writing flourishes in a classroom atmosphere which fosters independence, problem solving, language development, and positive social interaction.

Although it is now possible to find good books that discuss process approach writing, there are still very few language arts textbooks that promote good writing programs. Graves (1984e) cites research from 1976, updated in 1983, which shows that four of the leading elementary texts devoted a "pitiful" amount of space to writing. An average of 5% at the second grade level and 1% at the fourth grade level. Furthermore, many of the "creative" activities supplied topics or story starters.

It is important for teachers to become aware of the process approach to composition. Through readings, attendance at workshops, and observations of process classrooms, teachers need to be able to experience this method and see how they can develop their own style and incorporate it into their individual classrooms. It is essential that

teachers practice the craft of writing themselves. A teacher who is not familiar with the process, the struggles, and the successes of writing will have a difficult time teaching composition and relating to the needs of the writers.

One mid-size school district, Manchester, NH, has made such a committment to teacher training (1985). The first step they took was to order a series of books and articles (using funds not spent on grammar texts) about the writing process for each school. Teachers were surveyed to see what types of writing programs were being taught. Then, one teacher in each school was designated as the in-house "expert." That teacher would attend the initial conferences and training sessions and then bring the information back to colleagues. Support meetings helped teachers over the initial hurdles. The system has taken time to implement. But, slowly, teachers are developing reservoirs of ideas and experiences that will lead to the establishment of successful programs.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are many more directions in which composition research can go than I have room to document. There are, however, three specific areas that I would like to see studied.

I believe that a project should be undertaken that will attempt to ascertain what is currently happening in composition classrooms. The process approach to writing has been a part of our educational dialogue for about twelve years. There is strong evidence of its effectiveness but we do not really now how widely it is used. We do, however, know that story starters are still popular. The question must be answered:

What impact has the research and theory actually had on current classrooms?

A study of composition teaching practices was commissioned by the NCTE and undertaken in 1978 (Haley-James, 1981). Only 32% of the questionnaires were returned. Although no definitive conclusions can be made from the number of responses received, it does seem that teachers who were very interested in writing would have been more likely to complete the survey than teachers who were not deeply involved with writing. Although much information was gathered, I do not think that the questionnaire was designed in such a way as to isolate product from process approaches.

For example, respondents were never questioned as to their knowledge of current process philosophy. Nor were they asked to categorize their own approach to the teaching of composition. They were not asked whether texts and worksheets were used for spelling, grammar, and handwriting or whether these skills were covered within the natural context of writing. Furthermore, in the question concerning the "frequency of writing", the respondents were not given clear instructions concerning what to count as writing activities.

The information that was collected showed that there is a move towards the use of process principles but that there are still many teachers practicing product approach techniques. I would recommend the development of a survey that would update data to see how much growth has occurred in the seven years since the study. The design would allow for teachers to categorize themselves and their classroom environments

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so that their answers could be evaluated as a group as well as in subgroups.

The second research direction I would recommend would be in the area of language development. The research is not conclusive regarding the relationship between oral language and writing development. Some researchers feel that there is a close positive correlation, while others, disagree. I believe that, regardless of outlook, we do not have nearly enough activities in school that foster language development. Too often, students are not encouraged to express ideas and opinions. They do not have opportunities to discuss their schoolwork.

In the process approach to writing, there is an emphasis on speaking at all stages. Children are encouraged to discuss topic choice in order to develop topics that are meaningful to them and to their audience. Children conduct and participate in oral conferences which strengthen their communication skills.

I feel that a study should be conducted that would measure the actual amount of talking that children are allowed to do in classrooms. Dialogue could then be categorized by type. Finally, a comparison could be made between language in process versus product classrooms. I would hope that the data would help answer the question: What effect does process approach writing have any on language development?

Finally, I would like to see more research done in the field of word processors and the writing process. Bridwell, Nancarrow, and Ross (1984) state that "research concerning the effects of word processors on writing behavior is almost nonexistent..." (p. 383). Programs that help students pre-write, edit, and check for certain grammatical errors are

being developed at a rapid rate, but research is needed so that educators can determine whether the programs are effective or not.

Word processors, used in conjunction with video taping equipment would greatly facilitate the collection of data for protocol analysis. A timer and memory device could be attached to the computer so that the production history of a text could be recorded.

Donald Graves has recently started using a word processor himself and with students (Green, 1984). At first, he felt that the finished look of word processed documents would discourage revision. He now feels, however, that the ease with which changes can be made with computers will actually encourage children to experiment.

Graves feels that there is some very good software available to teachers and children. A new program, Quill (tm. Bolt Beranek and Newman, Inc.). seems to incorporate many process approach ideas. Other software, however, makes exaggerated claims about what it can accomplish and "reenacts an episodic kind of learning" (Green, 1984, p.24). Electronic story starters are even worse than those on paper since they squander valuable computer time.

Kaake (1983) presents an excellent overview of typing research and recent typing/word processor work. She suggests a model for teaching typing to young children. It is evident that instruction in keyboard skills is an area which demands further attention at all grade levels.

Word processors will not make good writing teachers out of poor teachers...thoughtful writers from careless ones. But even with effective programs, the computer will only produce writing that is as good as the writer at the keyboard.

Conclusion

As a result of my readings I find it fairly easy to conclude that there are substantial differences between product and process approaches in virtually all aspects of writing. This paper has discussed most of these differences and has focused on three major ones: topic choice, revisions, and conferencing.

The differences span classroom structure and curriculum emphasis, as well as teaching (and learning) methods, attitudes, and expectations. The difference between a product classroom and a process classroom can be seen in the physical layout of the room, the presence of children's writings and treasures, and the reliable writing schedule. The process classroom sounds different. There is the sound of children questioning their own work as well as the work of their peers. There is the sound of children voicing words in order to decide which letters to use. Process approach writing will tend to permeate all activities in a classroom, not just the Language Arts. Isn't that what we really strive for: a curriculum that attempts to integate varied subjects and provide more meaningful experiences?

There are some cautions that must be noted. As good as the process approach to writing is, we must not get "locked in" to believing that there is only one process that works for all children. Furthermore, the same child will not use the same process all the time. We must not codify the process so much that it becomes rigid and inflexible. We must remember that at the very heart of the writing process are individual teachers and individual writers.

Jensen and DeTiberio (1984) suggest that teachers "develop an understanding of how people differ and how these differences affect the writing process. We can then more effectively individualize writing instruction" (p. 287). Teachers must "look for and be more accepting of legitimate differences in how students write" (p. 299).

Selzer (1984) goes one step further. He contends that even the same child will not produce a consistent writing pattern. He agrees with Graves (1983) and Calkins (1983) by stating that growth will be erratic and that children will be able to produce highly invested topics only occassionally. Selzer feels that students have several writing techniques and will adapt their process to fit a given situation:

> Instead of prescribing a single composing model and instead of making assignments appropriate only to that model, teachers need to concentrate on expanding and directing students' composing repertoires, in much the same way they expand and direct students' stylistic repertoires. (p. 281)

Selzer implores teachers not to become "overly prescriptive" in their approach to the process. Graves labels orthodoxy as an "enemy" which could serve to "imprison children" (1984b, p. 184). Both warnings are well founded. Teachers must remain flexible in their approach to teaching the process. Writers must be flexible in their use of the process.

In the rush to emphasize the process we must never lose sight of the reason for writing: a finished product. Gorrell (1983) "...[issues] a mild warning that many current studies of the writing process try so hard to avoid over-emphasis on the product that they neglect important

and tangible processes" (p. 274). He says that much can be learned from examination of finished writing. He does not want the "... view of the composing process to become so narrow that...[we] fail to take advantage of analysis of the product for its value in illuminating the process" (p. 277).

Murray (1980) agrees. He feels that any attempt to break down an interractive process invites disaster. He fears that if writers compartmentalize the process, they may not be able to put it back together again into a cohesive whole.

Gorrell (1983) compares the writing of an essay to the making of mulligan stew. Both tasks are completed in steps. Both may be done with a variety of methods and ingredients. Expertise in both requires practice and experimentation. But, just as we must ultimately taste the stew, so must we also read the essay.

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